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Research Problem Review 78-23

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ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ARMY WORK FORCE AS A FUNCTION OF SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES

Jack M. Hicks

PERSONNEL AND MANPOWER TECHNICAL AREA

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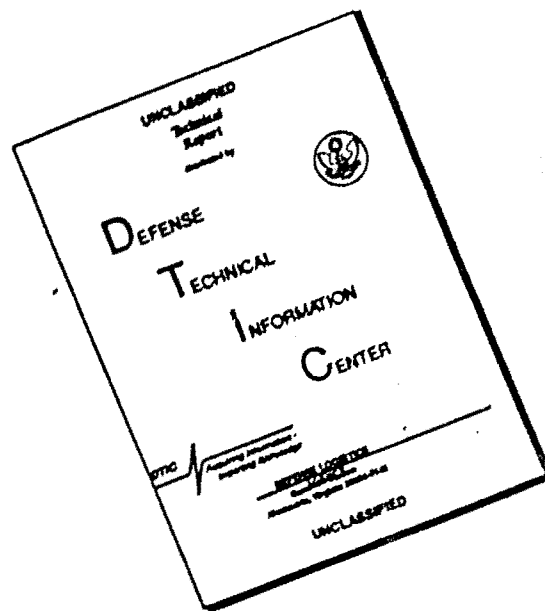
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Army Project Number

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Women in the Army

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OF SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES

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PERSONNEL AND MANPOWER TECHNICAL AREA

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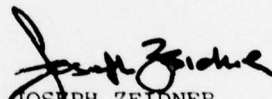
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FOREWORD

An important component of the research program of the Personnel and Manpower Technical Area of the Army Research Institute of the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) supports the increasing importance of women in the U.S. Army. This report analyzes the results of a technological base investigation of civilian women's perceptions of potential loss of personal female identity in Army jobs.

Data were collected by the University of South Florida under ARI Grant DAHC 19-78-G-0004. The technological base research was done under Army Project 2T161102A91B, Basic Research in the Behavioral Sciences.


JOSEPH ZEIDNER
Technical Director

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ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ARMY WORK FORCE AS A FUNCTION OF SEX-ROLE
STEREOTYPES

BRIEF

Requirement:

✓ A review of the literature on sex-role stereotypes suggests that women may refrain from applying for traditionally male-oriented occupations, where loss of feminine identity is likely to occur. This research investigated the effects on civilian women's perceptions of femininity and the desirability of an Army career for women, and of the sight of women wearing typical Army clothing and performing normal Army activities.

Procedure:

Subjects were 171 young civilian women, divided into three groups, who watched a series of slides depicting social, neutral, and task-related Army activities. Each group saw the models in the slides wearing one of three different types of clothing: civilian, Class A uniform, and fatigues. Subjects were told that the research was investigating the attractiveness to women of different types of jobs, including the Army. They were asked to evaluate the desirability of the activities shown, and also to evaluate the feminine attributes of the models.

Findings:

Type of clothing but not type of activity affected the subjects' perceptions of the model's femininity. The strongest correlate of reactions to the slides was overall attitudes toward the Army: the more favorable the attitude toward the Army, the more positive the perception of the models and the more favorable the reaction to the slide presentations. Subjects possessing pro-Army attitudes tended to be younger, less educated, black, and more antifeminist than did subjects with anti-Army attitudes.

Utilization of Findings:

The findings have useful implications for recruiting and retaining women, particularly in the civilian woman's perceptions of the Army.

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ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ARMY WORK FORCE AS A FUNCTION
OF SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES

A review of the literature on sex-role stereotypes¹ suggested that women may not apply for jobs in traditionally male-oriented occupations, or may soon leave such jobs, because of three interrelated perceptions. Women perceive themselves as lacking the necessary traits to function successfully in traditionally male roles; they think their male counterparts will reject them; and they perceive a potential loss of personal female identity. The research reported here was concerned primarily with the relevance of the third reason to recruiting and retaining women in the Army.

This research investigated effects of the sight of women wearing typical Army clothing and performing normal Army activities upon perceived female identity and on the desirability of the Army for women. To implement these objectives, the attire and activities of women in the Army were varied systematically in a slide presentation to a group of young civilian women. The effects of certain biographical, demographic, and attitudinal variables on the attractiveness of an Army career were also examined.

Subjects were 171 young women in the area of the University of South Florida, Tampa, Fla. The women were recruited by advertisements and announcements from four different sources: a secretarial college (n = 48), a 2-year community college (n = 29), a 2-year "career" college (n = 69), and an office skills class at a 4-year university (n = 25). The rationale behind these selections was that women attending the institutions were presumed to have a demographic background similar to women enlisting in the Army.

The study was explained as an investigation of the attractiveness to women of different kinds of employment, one of which was the Army. Subjects were asked to evaluate, for job desirability, a series of slides depicting three different activities in which one might engage while in the Army (Table 1). The activities portrayed were social, task-oriented, or neutral. The individuals seen in the slides (two women and one man) were actual enlisted members of the Army and wore three types of attire: civilian, Army Class A uniform, or Army fatigues. Each activity was combined with each type of attire to produce nine different slide types. Slide backgrounds were various scenes at an Army installation. The pool of subjects was randomly divided into three

¹Cohen, S. L., & Pennder, L. A. Underutilization of Women in the Military Work Force as a Function of Sex-Role Stereotypes. Final Report under Grant DAHC 19-75-G-0004. Tampa: University of South Florida, October 1975.

Table 1
 Descriptions of Slide Presentations for Each
 of the Three Activity Conditions

Activity	Slide description
Social	Bowling Getting on a docked sailboat Dancing Going to movie Bowling Lounge (drinking with others) Getting ready for boat ride Lounge (watching TV) Standing on the golf course At bar (chatting with others) Dining (formal with others) At stable (petting horse)
Neutral	Getting car filled by gas station attendant Entering base exchange At lunch (on line) Church (in front of) Testing dorm bed Examining closet space Waiting for service at gas station Shopping (looking at dresses) At lunch (seated with others) Church (examining the interior) Viewing beach (standing) Viewing beach (sitting)
Task	F-4 plane (examining) Communications console (seated in) Shooting rifle Blackboard (maneuver lesson) Examining truck pool Studying at desk (with book) Helicopter (exterior while seated inside) Helicopter (seated inside) Shaking hands with uniformed officer (male) Communications console (walking into) Setting up pup tent Examining C-5 mockup

groups; each viewed all three activity states in the context of a particular type of attire.

Respondents were asked to rate the female models, using a list of adjectives provided. Results indicated that when dressed in civilian clothes, the model was seen as gentler and quieter than when she wore fatigues or uniform. She was also seen as more feminine and softer in civilian dress than in fatigues and as more feminine in a Class A uniform than in fatigues. The model also was seen as most ambitious when she was in civilian dress. When dressed in fatigues or civilian clothes, she was seen as more independent than when she wore a Class A uniform.

The perceived low femininity in the fatigue attire condition is of particular interest and has two possible explanations. First, the fatigues do not make a woman look attractive. They tend to obscure physical characteristics usually associated with being feminine. Second, people attribute personal characteristics on the basis of the activity in which the other person is engaged. Fatigues are associated with field duty and combat, which traditionally have been considered masculine activities. This also would explain why the model was seen as more independent when dressed in fatigues, insofar as independence is associated with masculinity.

Of further interest is that, on the basis of the Slide Reaction Questionnaire, subjects were more likely to believe that the slides presented a more accurate picture of the Army when the model was dressed in fatigues than when she was dressed in civilian clothes or a Class A uniform.

The Slide Reaction Questionnaire was also designed to elicit respondent evaluations of the pictures as part of "an Army commercial" according to its potential influence upon (a) interest in an Army career, (b) desirability of an Army career, and (c) likelihood of joining the Army. Results showed that these reactions were not appreciably affected by the differences in slide content. That is, neither differences in dress, activity, or a combination of the two appeared to influence the perceived desirability of joining the Army or an Army career. Rather, the presence of weaponry (a rifle or F-4 fighter plane) in the slides appeared to have an overriding negative effect and was largely responsible for the absence of any differences in reactions to the activity states.

The best predictors of reactions to the slides were attitudes toward enlistment, followed by attitudes toward the Army in general. In both instances, the more favorable the attitude, the more favorable the reaction to the slides. This is not a surprising result, since both basic and applied research in advertising have shown that a person's attitudes toward an issue are the prime determinants of reaction to a persuasive appeal on that issue. In addition, demographic analyses

showed that the women with more positive attitudes toward the Army in general were more likely to be black and to have slightly less education than women with negative attitudes toward the Army.

The findings could have implications for the recruitment of women into the Army. Most notably, recruitment might be more effective if it would deemphasize those factors associated with traditionally male-oriented activities, such as fatigues, fighter planes, and rifles. Also, the fact that attitudes toward enlistment and the Army predicted slide reactions more reliably than any other factors suggests that recruitment of women is likely to be more efficient if appeals focus on women whose attitudes are already favorable. Finally, 32% of the subjects indicated that an Army career would be desirable. These women were generally younger, less educated, more likely to be black, and more antifeminist than those women with relatively negative attitudes toward the Army. Recruitment thus might expect to attract applicants resembling this description and might choose to aim more specifically at this population.